Claims

[c1]   1. A method for pre-screening customer data by a selling entity for credit pre-approval determination of a customer at a point of sale location, comprising:

receiving said customer data at a point of sale system; and

during a check out process:

transmitting said customer data to a server;

searching a database for said customer data; and

based upon results of said searching:

performing a credit worthiness check; and

providing said customer with an invitation to open a charge account; wherein if said customer accepts:

opening said charge account; and

if desired by said customer, executing a charge purchase during said check out process at said point of sale system.

[c2]   2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

holding said invitation open for a predetermined period of time; and

providing said customer with information on how to access said invitation at a future date.

[c3]   3. The method of claim 1, wherein said customer data includes at least one of said customer's:

name;

address;

telephone number;

social security number;

photo identification card; and

membership card relating to said selling entity.

[c4]   4. The method of claim 1, wherein said searching a database for said customer data includes determining whether a membership status of said customer is active or inactive; wherein further said credit worthiness check is performed on customer data with an active status.

[c5]

5. The method of claim 1, wherein said searching a database for said customer

data includes determining whether said customer has a current charge account with said selling entity.

[c6]   6. The method of claim 1 wherein said credit worthiness check is performed by a credit bureau.

[c7]   7. The method of claim 1, wherein said credit worthiness check is performed by a credit issuer.

[c8]   8. The method of claim 1 wherein said credit worthiness check is a full bureau check.

[c9]   9. The method of claim 1 wherein said credit worthiness check is a partial bureau check.

[c10]   10. The method of claim 1 wherein said performing a credit worthiness check includes determining at least one of:

a credit account limit;

an annual percentage rate; and

an account type;

for customers who have met specified criteria for said credit pre-approval determination.

[c11]   11. The method of claim 1, wherein said providing said customer with an invitation to open a charge account includes printing out said invitation and providing terms and conditions.

[c12]   12. The method of claim 1, wherein said providing said customer with an invitation to open a charge account includes:

offering said customer an incentive to accept said invention through at least one of:

a discount off of a purchase; and

a reduced interest rate.

[c13]   13. The method of claim 2, wherein said providing said customer information on how to access said invitation at a future date includes printing said information on a receipt at said point of sale system.

[cl4]   14. The method of claim 1, wherein data related to pre-approvals and declinations of invitations to open a charge account are transmitted to said server and customer records relating to said data are updated.

[cl5]   15. The method of claim 1, wherein said opening said charge account includes providing said customer with a charge card.

[cl6]   16. The method of claim 1, wherein said opening said charge account includes performing a fraud check, said fraud check including verifying said customer's identity.

[cl7]   17. A storage medium encoded with machine-readable computer program code for pre-screening customer data by a selling entity for credit pre-approval determination of a customer at a point of sale location, the storage medium including instructions for causing the selling entity to implement a method comprising:
receiving said customer data at a point of sale system; and
during a check out process:
transmitting said customer data to a server;
searching a database for said customer data; and
based upon results of said searching:
performing a credit worthiness check; and
providing said customer with an invitation to open a charge account; wherein if said customer accepts:
opening said charge account; and
if desired by said customer, executing a charge purchase during said check out process at said point of sale system.

[cl8]   18. The storage medium of claim 17, further comprising:
holding said invitation open for a predetermined period of time; and
providing said customer with information on how to access said invitation at a future date.

[cl9]
          19. The storage medium of claim 17, wherein said customer data includes at least one of said customer's:
name;

address;

telephone number;

social security number;

photo identification card; and

membership card relating to said selling entity.

[c20]   20. The storage medium of claim 17, wherein said searching a database for said customer data includes determining whether a membership status of said customer is active or inactive; wherein further said credit worthiness check is performed on customer data with an active status.

[c21]   21. The storage medium of claim 17, wherein said searching a database for said customer data includes determining whether said customer has a current charge account with said selling entity.

[c22]   22. The storage medium of claim 17 wherein said credit worthiness check is performed by a credit bureau.

[c23]   23. The storage medium of claim 17, wherein said credit worthiness check is performed by a credit issuer.

[c24]   24. The storage medium of claim 17 wherein said credit worthiness check is a full bureau check.

[c25]   25. The storage medium of claim 17 wherein said credit worthiness check is a partial bureau check.

[c26]   26. The storage medium of claim 17 wherein said performing a credit worthiness check includes determining at least one of:

a credit account limit;

an annual percentage rate; and

an account type;

for customers who have met specified criteria for said credit pre-approval determination.

[c27]   27. The storage medium of claim 17, wherein said providing said customer with an invitation to open a charge account includes printing out said invitation and providing terms and conditions.

[c28]   28. The storage medium of claim 17, wherein said providing said customer with an invitation to open a charge account includes:
offering said customer an incentive to accept said invention through at least one of:
a discount off of a purchase; and
a reduced interest rate.

[c29]   29. The storage medium of claim 18, wherein said providing said customer information on how to access said invitation at a future date includes printing said information on a receipt at said point of sale system.

[c30]   30. The storage medium of claim 17, wherein data related to pre-approvals and declinations of invitations to open a charge account are transmitted to said server and customer records relating to said data are updated.

[c31]   31. The storage medium of claim 17, wherein said opening said charge account includes providing said customer with a charge card.

[c32]   32. The storage medium of claim 17, wherein said opening said charge account includes performing a fraud check, said fraud check including verifying said customer's identity.

[c33]   33. A system for pre-screening customer data by a selling entity for credit pre-approval determination of a customer at a point of sale location, comprising:
a selling entity including:
at least one point of sale system coupled to a communications link;
a server coupled to said at least one point of sale system via said communications link;
a data storage device in communication with said server; and
a link to a credit information server;
wherein said customer data is processed and said credit pre-approval determination is made prior to said customer selecting a payment method.

[c34]   34. The system of claim 33, wherein said point of sale system:
receives said customer data;
transmits said customer data to said server;
processes check out activities;

receives credit pre-approval determination information from said server;

prints out data related to said credit pre-approval determination information; and

if desired by a pre-approved customer, an account number is generated and a

charge purchase is executed for merchandise selected by said customer.

[c35]   35. The system of claim 33, wherein said server:

accesses customer records relating to said pre-approval determination; and

if customer data stored in said customer records meets specified criteria, transmits

said customer to said credit information server for a credit worthiness check.

[c36]   36. The system of claim 33, wherein said link to a credit information server

includes a dedicated telephone line.

[c37]   37. The system of claim 33, wherein said link to a credit information server

includes an Internet connection.